

All of that has happened on a committee which has, on its left, 12 Democrats, and on its right, 10 Republicans. We don't agree on everything by a long shot. But on these issues we came to a result, did the job, and the Senator from Washington has been a conspicuous example of looking for opportunities for us to get a result.

People expect us to come to the Senate, stand on our principles, but not stop there—not stop there—and then put our principles together where we can combine those and get a result for the American people. I am pleased to be a part of that action and I congratulate her for it.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Today I am here to say the world is watching Venezuela. The Senate especially is watching human rights abuse in Venezuela. I especially am watching the case of Leopoldo Lopez, who has been in prison for 5 months. For what? For leading a political party and exercising his constitutional rights.

Senator MENENDEZ, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has spoken out about human rights abuse in Venezuela. Senator CORKER, the ranking Republican on Foreign Relations has spoken out about human rights abuse in Venezuela. Yesterday, Senator CRUZ of Texas gave an impassioned speech about Leopoldo Lopez in Venezuela and that conspicuous example of human rights abuse. Senator RUBIO of Florida has been at the forefront of this discussion with his leadership on the Foreign Relations Committee.

Today, I wish to speak about human rights abuse in Venezuela and to say to President Maduro in Venezuela that the world is watching. The world is watching him and his efforts to imprison his principal political opponent, Leopoldo Lopez.

Mr. President, many of us have visited Robben Island off South Africa's coast. When my family and I did that a few years ago, there was no moment that impressed me more in that visit than when some of those who were imprisoned there with Nelson Mandela still give tours of Robben Island, about where he lived and where he exercised and how he conducted himself in the 27 years he was there before he came back and was freed and became one of the most important persons in our world history.

It seems to me President Maduro of Venezuela is determined to turn Leopoldo Lopez into the Nelson Mandela of Venezuela by his unconscionable imprisonment of him principally because Leopoldo has spoken out and has expressed his political views about the country he loves.

Leopoldo was born in Venezuela and comes from a patriotic Venezuelan family, but he was educated in the United States which is where I met him. I met him when he was a student at Kenyon College. In fact, I made the graduation speech, when I was Secretary of Education, to the class in

which he graduated, and he was a friend of my son who was also a student. I watched him over the years. He went on to Harvard and obtained a master's degree at the Kennedy School. He could have stayed in the United States and had a very successful career, but he chose instead to return to the country he loved, Venezuela. He was elected mayor of a municipality at the age of 28 in an important area outside of Caracas. Four years later he was reelected with 81 percent of the vote. He is a rising star in Venezuela. There is no brighter star rising in the skies of Venezuela.

Hugo Chavez's government knew that someone like Leopoldo, who is well educated, charismatic, purposeful, and honest, with a desire to help his fellow Venezuelans, would do nothing but cause problems for their socialist government, so they barred him from running for public office and accused him of misusing public funds.

I suppose a lot of us would like to bar our principal opponents from running against us. The Senator from New Jersey and I are both in elections this year, but it hasn't occurred to us that in the United States we could actually do that. Elections are the lifeblood of our political system and the lifeblood of this country and the lifeblood of our liberty and freedom, but in Venezuela if you don't like your opponent, you just say they cannot run for office. That is what they did to Leopoldo.

Leopoldo fought back, taking his case all the way to the Inter-American Court for Human Rights and he won. I had an opportunity to see him in 2011 when he did that. I knew he would win his case. Anyone who listened to it believed that. He then stayed in Venezuela. He faced assassination attempts, harassment, threats, but never wavered in his call for the Venezuelan people to take action against the oppressive regime of Hugo Chavez and more recently Nicolas Maduro.

Venezuela is a rich country and has lots of money, but people cannot get toothpaste, people cannot get tissues. The inflation there is more than 50 percent. You would expect there to be a leader demanding change from the government, someone who could express the views of the people. Leopoldo is that person, but he has been in jail for 5 months. He has been barred from running for public office because he is that leader.

He is a husband. He is the father of two young children. He chose to turn himself in to face trial. He could have come to the United States or some other country and said, "I am in exile. I am a popular Venezuelan and I'll take the brave act of going into exile." No, he didn't do that. He turned himself in, with a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people behind him, because he is in the tradition of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mandela, and others is focusing his resistance in a nonviolent and a constitutional way. That is his lesson to the people of Venezuela.

However, he is in jail and has been for 5 months, and President Maduro keeps him there to silence the opposition. Or so the President thinks. Leopoldo's trial starts tomorrow. I say trial, although it is not a trial that we would recognize.

The distinguished chairman of the Judiciary Committee is on the floor today. He has been a leading spokesman for human rights across the country. He, too, is interested in human rights abuse in Venezuela. He would not recognize this trial.

The defense team of Leopoldo has attempted to bring forward 60 witnesses plus other experts to testify on their client's behalf. However, during a preliminary hearing every single witness for the defense was disqualified.

There is the distinguished lawyer, the Senator from Massachusetts, on the other side of the aisle. She knows what a trial is. She recognizes human abuse when she sees it, just as all of us do. So I think it is important for President Maduro, the people of Venezuela and the people in Venezuela who have been subjected to human rights abuse to know that is not going unnoticed in the United States of America, that there are Senators on the Democratic side and on the Republican side of the aisle who are paying close attention to this; that our State Department is reviewing this very carefully; that this sort of human rights abuse in Venezuela—a country badly in need of political discourse and leadership—is something we should not ignore. We should say to President Maduro: Free Leopoldo Lopez. By locking him up for 5 months you are not silencing him. You are helping to make him the Nelson Mandela of Venezuela.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Tennessee who has said that the trial he described is not a trial. It is a sham, and no honest and civilized country, no country that has even a pretense upon the rule of law should accept that kind of a trial. So I applaud the senior Senator from Tennessee for his comments.

JUSTICE FOR ALL REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I have been on this floor many times to talk about the need to support law enforcement and to ensure our criminal justice system serves everyone fairly. I do so again in light of a very disturbing report issued by the Justice Department's inspector general last week which describes serious flaws in some of our Nation's crime labs. The report focused on 13 crime lab examiners whose work was seriously flawed, but the worst part is that their testimony contributed to the convictions of thousands of offenders, including 60 people on death row.

The FBI launched an investigation. They discovered these mistakes, but even after they discovered them, it took them 5 years to notify those who were impacted—5 years that people were sitting in prison. During that time 3 of the 60 people on death row who were convicted and put on death row on potentially flawed evidence were executed and thousands more sat behind bars.

It is shocking and unacceptable. I mention this because even in a country such as ours, our criminal justice system is not infallible, and that is why I again urge the Senate to take up and pass the Justice For All Reauthorization Act. It is a bill I introduced with Senator CORNYN last year. It is a bipartisan piece of legislation which includes the Kirk Bloodsworth Post-Conviction DNA Testing Grant Program, which seeks to prevent travesties such as those described in the IG report.

It is named for Kirk Bloodsworth, a man who has become a friend to me over the years. He was convicted and sent to prison and could have been executed. In 1993, he became the first person in the United States to be exonerated from a death row crime through the use of DNA evidence.

Two hundred fifty additional people have been exonerated using this technology. Thomas Haynesworth was exonerated in 2011 after spending 27 years in prison for crimes he did not commit, thanks to a grant provided by the Justice for All Act. He was accused of rape in 1984, and wrongfully convicted. The real perpetrator went on to rape more than a dozen women.

The Justice for All Act takes important steps to strengthen the rights of victims of crime and reauthorizes the Debbie Smith Act which has provided significant funding to reduce the backlog of untested rape kits. The program is named for Debbie Smith, who waited years after being attacked before her rape kit was tested and the perpetrator was caught. She and her husband Rob have worked tirelessly to ensure that others will not experience such horror. I thank Debbie and Rob for their continuing help on this extremely important cause.

Just yesterday, a few blocks from here at the DC Superior Court, a man was exonerated by DNA evidence. Now that is the good news. He was exonerated. Kevin Martin was exonerated, but he spent 26 years in prison for the 1982 rape and murder of a Washington woman he had nothing to do with.

We know that in our criminal justice system mistakes are inevitable. But the Justice for All Act reauthorization gives us the chance to fix some of our most grievous errors.

Senator CORNYN and I believe that pursuit of justice is not a partisan issue, which is why we were pleased when our bill was unanimously approved by the Judiciary Committee back in October. Senate minority leader MITCH MCCONNELL is also a cosponsor of the bill. Every single Senate

Democrat has signed off on passing this. Senator GRASSLEY, the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, called the inspector general's report "shocking." I agree completely, we all agree, which is why it is time for the full Senate to reach an agreement and consider the Justice for All Reauthorization Act.

I thank the many law enforcement, victim services and criminal justice organizations that have helped to pinpoint the needed improvements that this law attempts to solve and I appreciate their ongoing support in seeing it passed.

Let's pass the legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO CFPB

Ms. WARREN. Thank you, Mr. President.

I am here today to say happy birthday to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. This week marks 4 years since Dodd-Frank was signed into law and 3 years since the consumer agency opened its doors.

The consumer agency was built to be a new kind of regulatory agency, one that would stand up for America's families, not for big banks or credit card companies.

The consumer agency was not popular with big banks and their friends in Washington. The financial services industry spent more than \$1 million a day fighting tooth and nail against financial reforms and they vowed to kill the consumer agency before it was ever born. But thanks to the work of grassroots consumer groups across the country that worked very hard and got organized, we pushed back against the big banks' armies of lobbyists and lawyers, and we won. We succeeded in building a strong independent consumer agency with the tools necessary to protect consumers against the tricks and traps hidden in the fine print of mortgages, credit cards, and student loans.

Under Rich Cordray's leadership, the staff of the CFPB has made amazing progress since it opened. This little agency has already forced big financial institutions to return more than \$4 billion to 15 million consumers they cheated, and it has helped tens of thousands of consumers resolve complaints about their financial institutions. It has put in place rules to protect consumers from a range of dangerous financial products and to make sure that companies cannot put out the kinds of deceptive mortgages that contributed to millions of foreclosures.

Recently the CFPB shared stories from people all across the country who have reached out to the agency for help with financial issues. One of these stories is from Ari, an Iraq veteran from Hull, MA. Ari and his father Harry told their story to CFPB. While serving in the military, Ari took out a car loan

advertised directly to servicemembers. The dealership promised Ari that he would be able to afford the loan, but after Harry read the fine print, he figured out this was a terrible deal. So Harry filed a complaint with the CFPB and the agency's investigation helped to uncover scams targeting men and women in uniform. Ultimately, the consumer agency ordered the auto lenders to refund about \$6.5 million to the servicemembers they cheated, and to agree to stop these practices immediately.

This is just one example of how people are fighting back, using the tools of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. It is also an example of how the consumer agency is standing up for families who have been targeted by scams and unfair practices. Together families and the agency are starting to clean up the market for consumer credit.

Sure, there is a lot left to do. The consumer agency still has important rules to put in place regarding payday lending, debt collection, and arbitration clauses. The biggest banks are dramatically bigger than they were during the financial crisis, and there is still too much risk in our system and too much need for reform. We need to keep pushing for changes that will make our financial system more stable and more secure to protect consumers and to keep our economy safe.

Stories such as Ari's and Harry's show that the consumer agency works and that the agency empowers people. In a badly tilted financial marketplace, the agency is giving consumers a fighting chance. This week is an opportunity to highlight these accomplishments and a reminder of how we can make Washington work for families all across this country.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session.

The clerk will report the motion to invoke cloture.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Andre Birotte, Jr., of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Jack Reed, Tim Kaine, Angus S. King, Jr., Thomas R. Carper, Bill Nelson, Jon Tester, Patty Murray, Claire McCaskill, Benjamin L. Cardin, Mark Begich,